

ARMENIAN MINIATURES

THE MATENADARAN
COLLECTION, YEREVAN

of the 13th and 14th centuries



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The Armenian miniature, distinguished for its superb artistic quality and highly original style, ranks among the most outstanding achievements of world art. Its history goes back to the time when the Armenian alphabet was invented (405 A.D.), and the earliest extant examples date from the sixth and seventh centuries. Even after the invention of printing in the early sixteenth century the fashion for illuminated manuscripts persisted in Armenia, and they continued to be produced up to the nineteenth century.

In the course of its long history Armenian miniature art came into close contact with the art of many Western and Oriental countries. This contact, while it enriched the scope of forms and motifs, did not in any way impair the national identity of Armenian art.

During the almost fifteen centuries of its development, the art of calligraphy and book illumination went through both decline and glory. One of the glorious periods, which can be described as the Golden Age of the Armenian miniature, covers the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was during this time that the main schools of book illumination were formed, and each of them developed a distinctive individual style. The most prominent of these schools were the ones in the provinces of Siunik and Vaspurakan, and in Cilicia. Many magnificent manuscripts were also produced in Armenian colonies abroad. The best works by Armenian illuminators are distinguished for their high artistic level and for the originality of their compositional, ornamental and colour principles.

The majority of medieval Armenian manuscripts are now in the possession of the Matenadaran Library in Yerevan, capital of Soviet Armenia.

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The Maesrob Mashtotz Matenadaran in Yerevan, apart from being an important research centre, is the largest manuscript library in the world.

The building for the Matenadaran Library was erected in 1959 to the design by M. Grigorian. In the same year, the Matenadaran research centre was founded, with the purpose of studying and translating books by medieval Armenian scholars, writers and poets.

The Matenadaran is also an art museum, with regularly organized exhibitions of illuminated manuscripts of olden times. The most remarkable and aesthetically valuable examples of Armenian miniature art are those dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which is also the period covered by the present edition.

